
A LIMITS TO GROWTH CRITIQUE OF THE RADICAL LEFT

THE NEED TO EMBRACE THE SIMPLER WAY

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The radical left in general has failed to recognise the significance of the "limits to growth" analysis of the global situation, and as a result its understanding of the required alternative to consumer-capitalist society is unsatisfactory. The most serious implications concern the many ways in which traditional radical left thinking on the transition process now needs to be revised or abandoned. The core element in the limits case is that we are entering an era of intense and irremediable scarcity, which rules out notions of emancipation in terms of centralised, industrialised, technically sophisticated or globalised systems, growth economies or affluent lifestyles. There must be dramatic reduction in rich-world levels of production and consumption and "living standards". The Simpler Way vision is of an alternative which achieves this goal while liberating us to enjoy a higher quality of life. It involves mostly highly selfsufficient zero-growth local economies, self-governing via local participatory processes, driven by commitment to cooperation, stability, the common good, frugal lifestyles and non-material satisfactions. This vision can only be realised via the gradual development of local communities informed by Simpler Way ideas and values. It cannot be imposed or given by a vanguard or state. This defines the revolutionary task and traditional radical left thinking is of little assistance in approaching it. Thus limits, scarcity, self-sufficiency and frugality are among the concepts that are now focal and that urgently need to be integrated into left theory and practice.

After decades of neoliberal triumph the dysfunctional nature of the global socio-economic system has become glaringly evident to large numbers of people and levels of discontent are rising. To a considerable extent this validates the general radical left critique of capitalism, especially regarding the inevitable tendency of its inherent contradictions to generate more and more serious and ultimately insoluble crises. However thinking within this perspective has been primarily concerned with class, exploitation, justice, inequality, power, elites and alienation, as distinct from issues to do with resources and environmental impacts and therefore with ecological sustainability. In recent years environmental considerations tend to have been added to the critique, by being recognised as additional problems capitalism generates, and as problems that will more or less automatically disappear when that system is scrapped.

The following argument is that ecological considerations show the general traditional radical left analysis to be insufficient and in need of major reformulation, especially with respect to a) its understanding of the significance of the limits to growth, b) the nature of the alternative, post-capitalist society to be worked for, and c) the transitional/revolutionary process and the best strategy to pursue. It will be argued that "The Simpler Way" perspective provides the most effective base for dealing with these themes.

The relation between these two approaches is not one of contradiction. The following argument is intended to show how traditional left analysis should be extended to embrace the latter perspective. This summary draws on the detail in my book, *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just Society* (Trainer, 2010).

The basic "limits to growth" perspective

The crucial beginning point for this critique is the claim that the radical left fails to grasp the nature and significance of the global sustainability crisis. Because the magnitude and seriousness of the predicament are not recognised adequately thinking about solutions and alternatives, and the transition to them, is fundamentally mistaken.

Over some fifty years a weighty "limits to growth" case has accumulated, but even in green circles there is insufficient appreciation of its strength and implications. Rich world per capita levels of resource consumption and ecological impact, along with the global aggregates, are now far beyond levels that that are sustainable or that could be made sustainable. When the magnitude and nature of the overshoot is grasped it is evident that the problems cannot be solved without historically unprecedented structural and cultural change, on a scale and at a pace that few would regard as possible to achieve. Consider the following few considerations.

The "footprint" index sums up the magnitude of the overshoot. To provide the average Australian with food, settlement area, water and energy now requires about 8 ha of productive land. (WWF, 2009.) If by 2050 9 billion people were to have risen to the present Australian "living standard", and the planet's amount of productive land remains the same as it is today (surely to be an invalid assumption), the amount available per capita would be 0.8 ha. In other words Australian's today are using 10 times the amount that would be possible for all to use.

Many other measures could be quoted to confirm the grossly unsustainable nature of <u>the present</u> situation. To this must be added the consequences of the fundamental commitment within consumer-capitalist societies, i.e., to ceaseless growth in production, consumption, "living standards", trade, investment and GDP. If a world population of 9 billion people were to rise to the GDP per capita Australians would have in 2050 given 3% p.a. growth in our present "living standards", then total world economic output would be approaching 20 times its present volume. The commitment to growth is clearly absurdly impossible, and suicidal.

These and other figures from within the limits to growth case are well known but their significance is not generally recognised. The main point is to do with the magnitude of the problems. The overshoot is far too great to be dealt with within or by a society committed to affluence or growth, whether capitalist or "socialist". A sustainable society cannot be defined other than in terms of levels of resource use, production, consumption and GDP that are a small fraction of present rich world or global levels, and that do not increase over time. The above figures indicate that the fraction is likely to be in the region of one-tenth of present Australian per capita levels.

The radical left has been about as unwilling to think in these terms as the neo-liberals or the mainstream (or the greens in fact; almost all green parties and agencies fail to question affluence and growth, knowing that if they do their voters and subscribers will desert them; see Moseley 2010 and Smith 2011 for documentation of the failure). The limits to growth analysis requires many traditional core left assumptions about the revolution to be jettisoned, especially the assumption that the task is to organise just redistribution but still within an industrialised, centralised, technology-driven and affluent society.

In addition it can be argued that the Left has not targeted the market mechanism satisfactorily. To Marx the fundamental fault in capitalism lies in the exploitation of labour in the productive process, whereby workers do not receive the full value they produce. Class rather than market is seen to be the original problem. Some Marxist societies have been happy to allow the market

a major role in determining what is produced and who gets it. However this does not acknowledge the way market forces ensure indeed guarantee that resource distribution and development inevitably favour the rich, including the rich workers. A society without a capitalist class will still allocate unjustly and develop the wrong things if it allows the market to determine these factors. But is there a place for markets, under social control? From The Simpler Way perspective this involves a contradiction in values that is ultimately unacceptable (although tolerable in the transition period). Market forces by definition involve a self-interested drive to maximise, gain, and accumulate and do not involve action motivated by public good or concern for the welfare of others. The Simpler Way envisages a slow transition period in which market forces are eventually completely scrapped. (See Trainer, 2008.)

Summing up the basic limits critique

It is, to put it mildly, extremely implausible that technical advance could make it possible for these problems to be solved within an energy-intensive, heavily industrialised, globalised etc. society enabling all people to rise to rich world "living standards". The multiples noted above indicate that a sustainable and just world cannot be achieved unless global, not just rich world, aggregate resource use, ecological impacts and economic output not only stabilise, but are reduced to a small fraction of their present levels.

Marx's account of capitalism is indispensable for understanding the global predicament. Its defining dynamic centres on the drive to accumulate and to commodify, and therefore on way the socio-economic system is unavoidably committed to limitless growth. However the study of Marx does not focus our attention on the fact that there are limits to growth and we have now run into them, or on the need to shift to far less materially affluent ways than we have now, or on the implications that goal has for transition thinking and action.

THE REQUIRED ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY: THE SIMPLER WAY

The foregoing sustainability critique shows that present rich world per capita resource consumption rates must be cut dramatically, possibly by 90%. This cannot be done unless there is a transition to some kind of Simpler Way. (Detailed in Trainer, 2010, 2012a.) This must involve:

<u>Simpler lifestyles</u>, far less production and consumption per capita, or concern with luxury, affluence, possessions and wealth, and much more concern with non-material sources of life satisfaction, mostly those spontaneously available within the new communities. A person's wealth, welfare and security will be a function of public resources not individual savings or property.

Mostly small, highly self-sufficient local economies, largely independent of the global economy, devoting local resources to meeting local needs, with little regional let alone international trade. As petroleum becomes scarce and materials become expensive there will be no choice about this.

More cooperative and participatory ways, enabling people in small communities to take collective control of their own development, to include and provide for all. In the coming era of scarcity it will be obvious that communities must cooperate to ensure that collective needs are met. This will involve local commons, committees, working bees, and town assemblies and

referenda making the important decisions about local development and administration. Thus most governing will have to be carried out by citizens via highly participatory arrangements, partly because expensive centralised states will not be sustainable but mainly because only the people who live within and have to maintain local economies are in a position to make and carry out the right decisions. The viability of the new systems will depend largely on the level of conscientiousness, community solidarity, empowerment and control, and experienced satisfaction. These crucial "spiritual" qualities can only thrive in small, cooperative and largely self-governing communities in control of their own fate.

A new economy, one that is a very small fraction of the size of the present economy, is not driven by profit or market forces, produces much less than the present economy, does not grow at all, and focuses on needs, rights, justice, welfare and ecological sustainability. The core unit will be the local economy. It might have many private firms and markets, but there must be basic (participatory, democratic, open and local) social control over what is developed, what is produced, and how it is distributed. Most economic activity will use local resources and will be controlled by ordinary citizen and geared to maximising the quality of life of all in the region. Top concerns must be to ensure that all are provided for, especially via access to a livelihood enabling a valuable and respected contribution to be made, that none are unemployed or poor or excluded, that individual, collective and ecological needs are prioritised.

In the transition period the goal must be gradual development of this "Economy B" increasingly focused on improving collectivist capacity to meet more needs, within/beneath the old mainstream Economy A.

Mostly village-level government, via participatory mechanisms. The amount of government and governing needed would be dramatically reduced, and its form would be radically different. The kind of economy just described involves all citizens in their own self-government. Most decisions will be made via informal discussion, committees, referenda and town meetings, and implemented via committees and working bees. Relatively little will be left for centralised state or national governments to do, although their roles will be important, e.g., in coordinating national rail systems, locating the few steel mills and heavier industries, maintaining communication systems. Ideally states would have no autonomous power but would derive all authority from the town assemblies through classically anarchist principles of delegation and federation.

The remarkable achievements of the Spanish anarchist collectives during the civil war (Dolgoff, 1990, Trainer, 2011) provide an inspiring example for the required form of town and regional citizen self-government. For three years in the 1930s ordinary citizens took control of the economies in which 8 million were living, including running factories, railways, banks, hospitals, universities, water supply, flour mills, research institutions and the city of Barcelona, via voluntary committees and without paid bureaucrats or politicians. They implemented major reforms in labour, equity, social justice, sexism and other domains. They printed their own money and abolished school fees. Regional federations looked after the weaker towns in their areas, transferring resources to those on poorer soils. Unemployed people were paid a full wage. Free housing was made available. Difficult and unpleasant work was rotated among workers. The basic governing mechanisms were voluntary committees and assemblies. This brief inspiring period in human history should be taken as establishing the viability of the approach to government that The Simpler Way requires.

The town's power to control its own fate is best seen in terms of minimally sufficient intervention. In an ideal town the ideas and values which good and sensible citizens hold would

lead to spontaneous actions to do what the town needed, so there would be little need for formal government let alone coercion. In the coming transition period we should seek only the power to set up arrangements that meet neglected needs, as distinct from the power to force or block. Where opposition is appropriate it might take the form of boycotts. The point is that it is very important not to give the impression that we are out to install a totalitarian town government with the power and intent to run everything coercively.

Note that this vision makes "socialism" more plausible, most obviously because the society to be run would be far less complex than present society is. There would be far fewer production, distribution, investment and trade decisions to be made, and far fewer mortal combats between entrepreneurs and developers for new investment opportunities. The left's task in persuading people to this version of socialism would be nothing like having to convince them that state bureaucracies can make all the decisions a globalised and complex consumer society involves.

Some very different values. Obviously The Simpler Way could not function unless the predominant outlook involved values and ideas that were cooperative not competitive, collectivist and less individualistic, and concerned with frugality and self-sufficiency rather than acquisitiveness and consuming. In a viable zero growth economy there could be no concern with accumulation of wealth since that would quickly lead to breakdown as the strongest got hold of most of the zero-sum amount of production or property. Similarly no attention could be given to economic competition. High priority would have to be given to equity and the situation of the least advantaged, or again cohesion would quickly suffer. The basic orientation would have to be concern with giving and nurturing and with the public good.

Perhaps most importantly all would have to be concerned to take collective control of the town's fate. There must be a determination to identify and eliminate problems, to establish good procedures, security, abundance, a rich cultural life, and a high quality of life for all, to develop and run an admirable and noble town. Whereas at present people accept as normal being governed from a distance and letting authorities work out what needs doing, the settlements of The Simpler Way require citizens determined to govern themselves, to take responsibility for and delight in ensuring the welfare of their town.

Clearly this domain of ideas, worldviews, values and commitments sets the greatest problems for transition theory and practice and is focal in the discussion of strategy below. It was the crucial element enabling the achievements of the Spanish anarchist collectives, and they were acutely aware of this, attending to the development of the required personality traits.

Some other specific features within the general Simpler Way vision are, -- many small firms and farms (some cooperatives, some privately owned) within and close to settlements, -- much use of intermediate and low technologies especially craft and hand-tool production, -- extensive development of commons providing many free goods especially "edible landscapes", -- building using earth, enabling all people to have very low-cost housing, -- voluntary working bees developing and maintaining community facilities, -- conversion of existing towns and suburbs into highly self-sufficient communities -- many committees, e.g., for agriculture, care of aged, care of youth, entertainment and leisure, cultural activities -- large cashless, free goods and gifting sectors -- little need for transport enabling bicycle access to work and conversion of most urban roads to commons -- the need to work for a monetary income only one or two days a week at a relaxed pace -- thus allowing intensive involvement in arts and crafts and community activities - town-owned banks -- a local currency that does not involve interest -- relatively low dependence on corporations, professionals and bureaucrats -- relatively little dependence on

high-tech ways, and much craft and hand tool production (mostly for their quality of life benefits.)

The situation would provide strong incentives to cooperate, help others, be concerned about the public good, take social responsibility, support community events and contribute to working bees. The economic focus would shift from getting to giving, knowing that when one gives generously one is likely to receive abundantly. Whereas consumer society typically involves less than zero-sum interactions, in The Simpler Way synergism is the norm; goodness generates further goodness. To give, care and contribute brings out in others appreciation and a desire to reciprocate. Thus the "spiritual" benefits of The Simpler Way become evident; it would enable liberation from the burdens of consumer society and open the way to a high quality of life for all despite, indeed because of, very low material "living standards".

There would still be an important though much reduced role for more distant and centralised institutions, such as base hospitals, universities, steel works, railway systems and wind farms. There need be no reduction in the level of highly sophisticated scientific and professional expertise, such as within research institutes, universities and hospitals, although far less would be needed in most areas, notably law, IT and communications. Many whole industries will be no longer needed, such as advertising. Investment in socially beneficial high-tech R and D could easily be greater than at present, because resources presently being wasted in frivolous ventures could be transferred to it. Light industry would be located in the regions surrounding towns, small farms and factories, mostly producing goods for the region but providing some exports to "pay for" imports from other regions and national sources such as steel works.

There will always be some important items which local communities cannot provide for themselves, and thus some degree of trade will be necessary. Ideally each small town would be within a regional economy producing items such as fridges and radios. Nations would only import small quantities of items they could not effectively produce for themselves. Most nations are quite capable of producing most of the things they need. The remnant "state" would have to ensure all regions had a share of the industries needed to produce for the national distribution of items such as steel, so they could pay for their few imports.

It is difficult to convey a sense of the potential that would derive from a combination of greatly reduced material lifestyle demand, intensive development of local self-sufficiency and the abundance that can come from simple low-tech ways. The most impressive of the (scarce) evidence comes from within the general Permaculture, Eco-village and Transition Towns literature. The document "How cheaply we could live well?" (Trainer, 2012c) derives tentative figures supporting the claim that current rich world energy, dollar and footprint costs could be cut by more than 90%, while improving all dimensions of the quality of life.

The integrated, inter-dependent nature of The Simpler Way needs to be stressed. For instance the kind of economy involved cannot exist without a particular geography of localisation, nor can it function effectively without grass roots participatory political institutions, community property and processes such as working bees, and none of these can exist without a culture centred on frugality, cooperation, nurturing, giving, responsibility and concern for the public good.

Specific aspects of the foregoing account might turn out to be mistaken but if the limits to growth predicament is more or less as severe as has been argued above, it is difficult to imagine how a sustainable, just and satisfying alternative society could be defined other than in terms of mostly small, largely self-sufficient and self-governing communities running their own local

economies that are not driven by market forces and that have no economic growth, and in terms of a culture that is focused on other than individualistic, competitive and acquisitive goals. The core defining concept has to be material simplicity in systems, institutions and above all lifestyles, although this would enable increased cultural complexity, diversity and quality.

Thus the magnitude of the required revolution could easily be overlooked; the argument has been that sustainability and justice require greater economic, geographical, political and especially cultural change than has probably occurred in at least five hundred years. This is not optional. The resource and ecological limits of the planet will force us to decimate current rich world per capita levels of production and consumption, whether we like it or not. The choice is only whether we will make the enormous adjustments sensibly and smoothly or allow nature to impose them via die-off. It is quite possible, indeed likely, that this vision is unachievable given the condition in which the capitalist era has left us.

Despite the odds, a major factor in our favour is that The Simpler Way <u>requires</u> and <u>rewards</u> the right values and behaviours. All will be acutely and constantly aware that their welfare and fate depend on how well their town and its local economy and biological and social ecology are functioning. This will motivate collectivism, concern for those in most need, problem solving, responsibility, conscientiousness and good citizenship. Capitalist society requires and rewards undesirable values and behaviours whose feedbacks accelerate social disintegration.

It should be emphasised that the Simpler Way is not a prediction. It is a vision, a statement of desirable goals to be worked for.

Implications for Third World "development"

A common response to the Simpler Way vision from people on the left is that "de-development" would condemn the world's poorest billions to even greater poverty. Sadly this reveals the unwitting acceptance of conventional development theory, along with its mistaken "uni-dimensional" conception of development.

In Chapter 5 of Trainer 2010 the largely unrecognised distinction between capitalist development and Appropriate Development is discussed. Unfortunately Marx took for granted the capitalist conception of development. He, like almost all Western development theorists and practitioners since, saw development as movement up a uni-dimensional path to industrial-affluent society, driven by the increasing capacity to invest capital, produce, and purchase goods from the economy. The advent of socialism as most Marxists conceive it today would continue the process, but with the capital in society's control not in private hands, and with better distribution of the product. Most importantly they think development can't occur without the investment of capital, and that what is developed can only be determined by those in control of capital. The "subsistence" characteristic of cultures unaccustomed to the Western way of cities, bureaucracies, centralisation, factories, marketing etc. is seen as primitive, thwarting development, and to be eliminated.

The limits to growth perspective reveals much of Marx's taken-for-granted goal to have been mistaken, making it clear that the good society cannot now be defined in terms of affluent or industrialised society, and that frugality, subsistence, and localism are essential. Moreover self-sufficiency becomes focal at the national, regional, village and household levels, and dependence on external inputs, especially capital, is avoided as much as possible. Appropriate Development is primarily do-it-yourself development. Above all it recognises that most basic necessities

required for a high quality of life for all can be provided with little or no monetary capital. The tragedy of conventional development is that billions suffer poverty while they are surrounded by the sufficient and usually abundant soils, forests, rainfall, and labour and skills that could meet most and often all need for good food, housing, water supply, sanitation, clothing, basic education and health care, leisure and cultural activities, via local cooperatives and craft industries using low and intermediate technologies. Often all that is lacking is not inputs but simply awareness of what could be done, and organisation.

Conventional development theory decrees that development cannot take place until someone with capital thinks he can make more profit investing in the region than anywhere else in the world and sets up a factory to export cosmetics to rich world supermarkets, generating a minute trickle down benefit and export earnings ... which must then be used to import necessities and pay for development. Because capital is assumed to be the lynch pin massive loans must also be taken on, which typically quickly result in crippling interest demands, debt slavery, the fire-sale of assets to foreign banks and corporations, and an economy firmly geared to serving rich world interests. After many decades this approach will indeed have lifted some and at times many to better "living standards"...in the few countries that won the competition for export markets and foreign investment, while a billion in the Fourth World sink further into squalor.

A few have attempted to draw attention to this contradiction and the alternative, notably Schumacher, (1999), Samana, (1988), Mies and Shiva (1993), and perhaps most remarkably of all Ghandi. Almost one hundred years ago he saw that there could never be enough resources for the Third World to develop to be like rich countries and he argued that the goal of development should be highly self-sufficient and cooperative villages based largely on simple and traditional technologies. Unfortunately Nehru took India down the conventional path to industrialisation, centralisation and now ton globalisation, grotesque inequality and injustice.

The left is well aware that the global economy gears local productive capacity to the enrichment of distant elites, and that IMF and World Bank loan "conditionality" expressly <u>prohibits</u> its application to local needs…and when all else fails military force is likely to be used to install regimes willing to rule in the interests of the rich world. (See Trainer, 2009.) But the left's concern has mostly been that these processes thwart Third world success in the global economy, whereas The Simpler Way rejects not only the assumption that development has to involve competing in the global economy, but also and more importantly it rejects the conventional, capital-intensive and affluence-oriented concept of development typically assumed by the left.

Thus The Simpler Way has to be the development goal for poor as well as rich countries, if only because the universally taken-for-granted goal of conventional development, i.e., rising to rich world GDP and "living standards", is shown by the limits analysis to be totally impossible and a recipe for global catastrophic breakdown. It follows that the most important precondition for Appropriate development is Simpler Way consciousness, the realisations that conventional development theory and practice constitute only one conception among many possibilities, that the limits to growth mean that it cannot work for all, that it is an approach which does little or nothing for most people while it allocates their resources to the enrichment of the rich few...and that there is an alternative. Billions of people suffer miserable conditions primarily because these elementary points are not understood.

Thus the common view on the left that to embrace The Simpler Way would be to prevent the world's poor from developing is a serious mistake deriving from a mistaken conception of

development. It assumes that the goal of development is affluence and it assumes that capital investment is the major factor enabling it.

Implications for the "de-growth" movement

The recent emergence of the De-growth movement has been extremely encouraging but the literature often gives the impression that the significance of abandoning growth has not been fully grasped. The preoccupation has been with arguing the evils of growth and relatively little attention has been given to the form that a zero growth economy would take. Often growth is seen as a serious mistake but one that can be cut away leaving us to go on more or less as before, as if we decided to remove a faulty air conditioning unit from a house. Growth however is not another thing our society *has* -- this *is a growth-society*. Growth is integral to its core structures and processes and it can't be got rid of without largely remaking the whole society.

To start with, if there can be no growth then there can be no interest on loans or investments expected, paid or received. If there is no growth then there must be a fixed amount of producing and consuming going on all the time, so it cannot be possible for some to lend money and at the end of the year get back more than was lent (...without soon having transferred all money to the lenders.)

There goes almost all of the finance industry. Banks would have to be little more than places where savings were kept and the flow of a fixed amount of money was facilitated. Investment decisions would have to be about maintaining and/or reallocating a constant stock of plant, or building different factories as the old ones wore out, and most of these decisions would be made collectively in terms of community needs. Retirement incomes could not come from returns on investments.

The problem of equity would have to be solved. In a growth society it can be ignored because everyone can be persuaded that the rising tide lifts all boats and you will get rich eventually. If it becomes understood that the tide is never going to rise again then the distribution of the set and severely limited amount of wealth becomes problematic and unless acceptable solutions are found there is soon likely to be trouble. What degree of inequality in property ownership would be tolerated?

Similarly (economic) competition would have to cease. The trouble with competition is that someone wins, and again if there is only a constant volume of spoils there can be no social stability if some are allowed to beat others to a greater and greater share.

Fundamental challenges would be set for the functioning of markets and investment. Fluctuating supply and demand might still be allowed to alter prices and incomes but again if not strictly confined and regulated competition to maximise income via market operations would soon lead to socially destructive inequality. There could be no growth in asset values or associated income. If output was stable the scope for investing capital would be severely limited to the replacement of the fixed stock of factories etc. Society would be under great incentive to make sure that the fixed and severely limited resources and productive capacity were devoted to meeting needs, which is precisely what is not done when capital is in private hands and markets determine development and distribution.

At this point it hardly needs to be added that capitalism is incompatible with de-growth. Capitalism is about accumulation, i.e., investing in order to have more to invest next year, in a

never-ending spiral, and in a satisfactory and stable zero-growth economy this would not be possible. It would be possible for capital to be privately owned in a zero-growth economy but its owners could only draw a constant "rent" and again this would not be likely to be tolerated by the rest for long in conditions of scarcity and local control over the general economic welfare.

Most problematic of all, in a zero-growth society there could be no concern with gain, with getting richer, with acquisition of wealth or property. Again this is because it would be a zero-sum game. Thus there would have to be a totally new motivation for work, innovation, investment, research, and risk taking. (A sensible society would strive to minimise risk and where it remained to share it collectively, e.g., via community investment funding.) The basic economic motive would have to be giving, not getting. That is, people would have to be happy to work and contribute in order to help others and their community to thrive, knowing that if it does they will benefit. (This does not mean there can be no role for money, as an accounting tool, or privately owned firms.)

Clearly these implications also mean that in a de-growth society there could be no interest in affluent lifestyles, and again the de-Growth literature tends not to show that this is well understood, let alone that rich world "living standards" will have to be at a small fraction of their present level.

The unavoidable result of putting these conditions together is a "socialism" of some kind, i.e., the collective social determination of production, distribution, investment, resource use, etc. Because these functions could not be left to free competition between wealth-maximisers within a market, which in a zero-sum situation would quickly lead to explosive inequalities, then they would have to be carried out via rational collective planning and organisation. The intense localism of TSW means that this social control would be exercised through thoroughly participatory local assemblies, with little coordinating, monitoring etc. left for (powerless) "state" bureaucracies to carry out. (Nevertheless I argue strongly that most productive enterprises should be privately owned, by individuals, families and cooperatives, for the quality of life benefits, although obviously these would have to be under social control; see Trainer, 2010, Chapter 5.)

This means that far more daunting than the economic revolution implied here is the cultural revolution. A de-growth society cannot function unless the thinking, valuing and motivation of people in general contradict some of the fundamental elements that have driven Western society for two hundred years. Above all is that drive to get rich. Individuals and firms must be motivated by desire to enjoy producing, serving and providing in order to receive only a sufficient income, with no interest in growing, driving out competitors, or taking over more business. If those sentiments remain, the strongest few will soon dominate.

Growth is therefore emphatically not something that can scrapped while present society goes on as before. De-growth has to be seen as part of a multi-dimensional transition to a The Simpler Way society of some kind. Much of the De-growth literature fails to recognise the size of the tiger it has by the tail. Getting rid of growth would require an almost complete remaking of present economic, political, social, geographical and cultural systems, and much more than getting rid of growth is required.

Utopian dreaming? The Simpler Way vision is obviously easily criticised for being unrealistic and assuming more than humans are capable of. This misses the point. If the general analysis of the unsustainability and irremediable injustice of consumer-capitalist society sketched above is correct then The Simpler Way has to be the ultimate goal, whether or not the chances of

achieving it seem remote. Yes the kind of citizen it would require might seem to be quite different to most people in consumer-capitalist society, but that just defines the task for revolutionaries. The kinds of things the Spanish anarchists did cannot be done unless there are many good cooperative, conscientious, responsible citizens. We either enable the required vision and values, or we will not make it through the coming time of troubles.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSITION THEORY AND PRACTICE

It the foregoing analysis of the situation and the required alternative society is valid, then profound implications for transition thinking follow. Indeed if it is the case that only dramatic change to some kind of Simpler Way has to be the goal then most previous mainstream and left thinking about the way to achieve a satisfactory society is of little or no use to us. It will be argued that this is especially true of Marxist thinking and current "socialist" strategy. On the transition problem, most value is to be found in anarchist thought (although the end goal might well be regarded as a non-authoritarian socialist society.)

The revolution is bigger than you thought

The argument has been that sustainability and justice cannot be achieved unless many of the basic structures within consumer-capitalist society are scrapped and replaced. The task is therefore far bigger than most on the left have imagined. Many have assumed that all that is required is a change of leadership but then the same old goals of raising living standards and the GDP can be pursued via the same old centralised, industrialised, globalised and representative democracy means. However we are faced with having to achieve a multi-dimensional transition from most of the basic elements that have driven Western culture for hundreds of years. The economic and political changes are daunting enough but the most difficult changes will be to do with ideas and values. For instance the universally taken for granted idea of progress that has dominated since the Enlightenment has to be entirely rethought to accommodate the notions of limits, irremediable scarcity, stability and frugality.

The good society cannot be an affluent-industrial society

It can be argued that the limits to growth analysis shows that capitalism is not the fundamental problem confronting the planet. Clearly a sustainable and acceptable world order cannot be achieved while the capitalist economy remains, but we must do much more than transcend capitalism. If we eliminated capitalism and implemented "socialism" everywhere but remained committed to affluent living standards and ceaseless increase in the volume of production and consumption, then we would inevitably still have just about the same range of sustainability problems we have now. The rich world would have to go on grabbing most of the scarce resources because there aren't enough for all to be as rich as we are, and more and more Third World productive capacity would have to be geared to rich world consumption. More environmental damage would accumulate, regardless of how energetically a socialist economy sought to eliminate waste, corruption, advertising and inefficiency. Obviously a good, post-capitalist, society cannot be an affluent, industrialised or consumer society.

Marx was wrong in assuming that a good society is not possible before the productive forces reach high levels of development. Many "primitive" societies and presently functioning alternative communities show that only very low material living standards and levels of

industrialisation and technology are necessary for a high quality of life. Many homesteaders and members of Eco-villages live idyllic lives in peasant ways, using little more than hand tools and natural materials such as earth, wood and leather, and being secure within cooperative social arrangements. I know these things at first hand from the bush-homestead way I live. Apart from a very few items such as medicines, my lifestyle would be easily achieved without sophisticated technology, international trade or mass production. Most of any modern technology I use, such as corrugated iron, seeds, shoes, cement, paint, hand tools, 12 volt electricity and radios, could have been produced with pre-1950s technology. The average per capita household per capita electricity consumption in Australia is thirty times as high as mine. (See How Cheaply We Could Live Well; Trainer 2012.)

The good life and the good society depend primarily on values and expectations, on having purpose and worthwhile work, on the richness of community and culture, and on the collective capacity to organise sensibly. They do not depend much on material goods, income, modern technology or the GDP. The world and indeed most Third World countries have far greater GDP per capita and levels of technical sophistication than are necessary for a good society. So "socialism" does not require a high level of "development of the productive forces."

Several contributors to "eco-socialism" broadly defined, including Kovel, 2007, Albert on "Parecon", 2003, Fotopoulos on "Inclusive Democracy", 1997, and Bookchin on "social ecology", have made valuable contributions to the discussion of possible structures for post-capitalist society. However none of them recognises the significance of scarcity and simplicity, or grasps the crucial, game-changing fact that the good society cannot be an affluent society, or attempts to work out what form a satisfactory society therefore has to take. The need for intense frugality and localism, and a very different culture are not recognised or discussed, let alone is space given to the form and function of a possible alternative frugal, cooperative and localised society.

An unavoidable, painful long march through capitalism?

Devotees of Marx's "laws of history" are strongly inclined to believe that capitalism has to mature before its contradictions will bring about self-destruction and then satisfactory development can begin. For instance Warren (1980) argued this and various gurus and organizations have refused to support revolutionary movements on the grounds that their societies were not far enough down the path to capitalism.

The argument in Chapter 12 of Trainer 2010 is that we do not have to wait for capitalism to self-destruct or be destroyed. Not only can we get on with Appropriate development here and now (although in some situations this is made very difficult), it is the only way this revolution can be advanced. (This is the main argument below re transition strategy.)

It is remarkable that late in his life Marx came to entertain the possibility of a quicker and more direct route to post-capitalist society, a route which does not involve first defeating capitalism in mortal combat. He toyed with the possibility that the Russians might build socialism on the existing model of the Mir, the traditional peasant collective village, without having to fight capitalism head-on and defeat it. (See Shannin,1995, Bideleux,1985, Bookchin, 1977, Buber, and Kitching,1989.)

The "Mode of Production"

Central in the Marxist account it is the focus on the mode of production. The fundamental fault in capitalism is seen in the fact that it is a productive system in which a small class owns capital while most people make up the large class which must sell its labour to capitalists, and the working class is exploited because it does not receive the full value it creates in the capitalist's factories. To a Marxist progress is to do with the transition to "a more advanced mode of production."

It is not that the limits to growth perspective shows this analysis to be mistaken or unimportant. However attending to the mode of production does not focus attention on what is now the most important problem, which could be labelled the mode of consumption. Marxist theory gives little or no attention to this factor. Again let us assume that we abandoned the capitalist mode of production and put production entirely under social control. As has been explained, this in itself could make little or no difference to the global ecological predicament if the rich countries remained determined to consume as they do now.

Of course much of the detail above regarding the new communities is in fact to do with a new mode of production, but not one that is more technically complex, productive or sophisticated than that characteristic of capitalist society. It is in many respects a more "primitive" technology, involving crafts, hand tools and labour-intensive gardening, and closer to the ways of the peasant than those of the industrial worker. (However the "relations of production" would not be primitive. They would be close to those Marx envisaged, i.e., there would be democratically control of the means of production and no class domination.) We could put it this way; the Marxist threat to capitalism is the strike, i.e., the threat to withhold labour, but The Simpler Way raises a far more dreadful threat; the threat to withhold our shopping.

The role of force and power

It is assumed by Marxists that fundamental system change will inevitably involve force, the exercise of power, and overt, intense and violent conflict, on the grounds that the ruling class will not voluntarily step aside and it will have to be pushed. However from The Simpler Way perspective, force and power have little relevance. This is not a matter of moral or aesthetic preference. In previous revolutions they were crucial but given the historically novel situation we are in and the unprecedented goals this sets, issues to do with force and power should not be given much attention.

Consider again the logic of the situation. We cannot have thriving local economies unless people in general willingly adopt the new ways and make them work because they understand why such arrangements are necessary, and more importantly, because they find those ways of living satisfying. The Simpler Way cannot work without a motivation whereby people in general find strong intrinsic values and rewards in living simply, cooperatively and self-sufficiently and living in the knowledge that only by following The Simpler Way can we enable a satisfactory life for ourselves and all other people. Force, power and confrontation can make no contribution to achieving this cultural or psychological goal. It is not possible to force people to eagerly, conscientiously and happily build and run their own frugal household economies and local cooperative economies and take participatory control of these. Either they will want to do what's needed primarily for the satisfaction this yields, or it won't be done. Therefore the essential revolutionary task is to help people in their towns and neighbourhoods come to the necessary vision and willingness, and to build the necessary skills.

Thus it makes no sense to think about getting rid of the old system as a step that can be taken prior to or separately from building the new one that this revolution is about. It is not at all likely that a vanguard party can get rid of capitalism and run everything in the ways now required, for a long time until people have become capable of running everything themselves, if only because the new ways by definition cannot be run from the centre.

This rejection of the role or use of power is argued by some of the best known anarchists of the past, including Tolstoy and Kropotkin. If you had given them state power on a plate they would have turned away knowing that it is of no use. In Bookchin's terms Marxists are out to seize power while anarchists are out to dissolve it. (1972, p. 297.) Power can't be used to create autonomous citizens who will govern their own villages well. Kropotkin urged revolutionaries simply to get on with the task of developing within their communities the awareness that would enable and motivate self-government. If people will not rise to the opportunity to take control of their own affairs this means there is still a lot of consciousness-raising work to be done. Thus it would be a waste of time trying to take control of the state from the ruling class because that effort can make no contribution to raising the necessary grass roots awareness. And when that job has been well-enough done there will probably be no need to confront or fight, because people will just vote with their feet and ignore the old ways and build and practise the new ones. Again the task is to create the psychological and social conditions whereby communities can and wish to govern their own local cooperative communities, and force and power cannot help us do that. The achievements of the Spanish anarchists in the 1930s were due to the widespread prior existence of the crucial ideas and values. The key element in that revolution was the long slow development of those dispositions. The remarkable new systems they organised in 1936 were consequences of that process.

This emphasis on the irrelevance of force refers to what must be our focal concern today, which is the preliminary and then the main stages of the revolution. However if the revolution goes well, late in the process there could be a need for some kinds of coercion as communities taking control of their localities have to deal with the die-hards. There are reasons for thinking that this phase could avoid serious conflicts and violence. Firstly we would realise how important it is to proceed in a way that is as civilised and indeed friendly as possible, guided by the recognition that people in our locality will have to work together with good will in future. Jared Diamond explains how in "primitive" cultures the supreme goal when dealing with conflict is to re-establish good social relations because the parties will have to co-exist tomorrow. The Spanish collectivists took property from capitalists but then allowed the previous owners to participate. It would be wise to grapple with the question of appropriate compensation for firms built by individual effort over time, and with just redeployment of firms no longer needed.

Secondly, resource scarcity plus accelerating depression will severely limit the power of the centre to thwart localism, meaning a reduced probability of having to fight against repression by the capitalist class. (See below.) Thirdly, resistance from the local petty bourgeoise is not likely to be strong because they will be the first to go down as the depression worsens. They too will see that their families' capacity to obtain basic food and other necessities will best be secured by cooperating with local collective initiatives. In any case the emerging local cooperative management of the economy would be increasingly able to go around those firms to organise its own supply of basics, putting further pressure on recalcitrant firms to come over. In Spain many struggling small firms were combined and rationalised, making participants more secure and freeing resources for redeployment. Keep in mind that the goal is not to smash the local capitalist class, but to transform the local economy into one in which all are provided for, and all would understand this. Thus the likelihood of destructive conflict between small

businesses desperately trying to hold onto dwindling markets as their only source of survival would be reduced.

For these reasons it is possible that the force needed to push through the final stages of the creation of the new local systems might not involve savage conflict or indeed any violence. If the revolution approached this situation of widespread development of local largely cooperative economies then the transfer of the (relatively small, remnant) state to the new vision would probably then be a relatively smooth consequence as there would be mass support for that.

Take state power?

It follows that the essential traditional socialist goal needs to be rethought. To Marxists it is crucial to seize and use state power, both as the essential step in the process of revolution and as the (immediate) post-revolutionary goal. But from the perspective of The Simpler Way it is a serious mistake to see taking state power as a focal revolutionary strategy. It is not just illadvised, it is a logical mistake. It will be largely a consequence of the revolution, not a cause.

Firstly, as has been explained state power cannot make the new villages work. It does not matter how much control lies in the hands of the state or its secret police, this would be of no value whatsoever in getting people to contribute willingly, conscientiously and happily to the new neighbourhood and town socio-economic systems, or to work out how to run their unique local economy well. A distant state simply cannot work out what are the best ways for each little locality with its own idiosyncratic set of values, conditions, history, personalities and problems, and it cannot make us want to find and practise those ways. It cannot impose or even give the necessary dispositions, arrangements and skills. These can only be developed, learned and discovered slowly through conscientious town trial and error experience.

"But ..." the socialist is likely to protest, "... being in control of the state will enable the new ways to be introduced and facilitated. Control of the state will make it possible for us to work on that shift in mass consciousness." Let us consider the logic here. There are only two ways that the control of the state for Simpler Way purposes could come about. The first is via some kind of coup whereby power is seized by a vanguard party which has the intention of implementing The Simpler Way, and then converting uncomprehending masses to it. This is not credible. The second path would be via the election to government of a party with a Simpler Way platform. But that could not happen unless the revolution for a simpler way had previously been won! We could not get electoral control of the state until after we had won over the majority of people to our proposals. Thus the revolution will be essentially constituted by the development of widespread acceptance of the Simpler Way vision. (As Bookchin emphasises, in all real revolutions, as distinct from coups, it is the development of widespread commitment to new ways that results in changes in structures and power.) The work to be done is to try to spread that vision, not to try to take state power.

The role of the working class

The left has a fundamental faith in the importance and the role of the working class. To Marxists it is axiomatic that change will come through the revolutionary action that class will take. As Wood says, "... the working class, strategically situated at the heart of capitalism, is still the only social force with the capacity to transform it." (Wood, 1998, p. 33.)

Unfortunately the traditional class interests of "workers" in capitalist society do not align well with The Simpler Way. They are about better conditions, bigger pay cheques enabling greater consumption, more jobs and production, more trade, a greater role for the state in running things, redistribution of wealth and provision of better "welfare" by the state. In general the working class is strongly in favour of economic growth. Higher "living standards", better pensions and more state expenditure on health education, and especially more jobs, are seen to depend directly on how rapidly business turnover and GDP can be increased. Unions, socialist organisations and working class people in general are hostile to any suggestion that there is a problem of affluence, industrialisation or over-development, given that most of them struggle financially. Anyway, they believe scarcities and deprivation will be resolved once expropriation by the capitalist class ends and the contradictions capitalism imposes are eliminated. They are especially unsympathetic to any suggestion that the solution has to involve reduced per capita levels of consumption and a shift to simpler lifestyles. This is immediately seen as condemning those who are poor and struggling to even lower living standards.

At a more profound level there are problems to do with the situation and the psychology of the worker. Bookchin (1973, p.183, 1977) points out that the industrial worker is intensely disciplined by the factory mode of production to acceptance of authoritarian conditions, to the puritan work ethic, to doing what he is told and of not seeking autonomy or imagining a post-capitalist world. His experience does not include co-operating with others to take charge of his own situation, plan, organise, and run things. Illich discusses the conditioned lack of autonomy and responsibility, the readiness to leave things to corporations, governments and experts. The worker is a specialist, without the multi-skilled "jack of all trades" orientation that the peasant or homesteader must have. The small farmer or businessman, the co-operative member, and the homesteader must be autonomous and responsible, monitoring, planning, fixing, adjusting, anticipating problems, improving, thinking about the system all the time. Workers can knock off at five and do not need to think about or assume responsibility for the whole system as the homesteader does. The conditions they experience tend to produce more interest in a good wage enabling a good car, shopping at a good supermarket, and looking at a good plasma TV.

Marxists in particular seem not to have noticed that their goals do not question the fundamental transition underlying the emergence of capitalism when people lost their capacity to provide for themselves from their small plots and commons, and were forced to work for wages. The worker now needs money to acquire necessities and the typical Marxist revolutionary vision does not challenge this. There is no interest in self-sufficiency, or the skills that enable it such as gardening and craft. Industrialisation, electrification, infrastructures and freeing the forces of production from capitalist relations of production will provide the goods for workers to buy. There is no interest in enabling small communities to maximise their collective productive capacity and security; indeed that is "subsistence" and is to be eliminated. The contrast with The Simpler Way could not be more stark since it focuses on reversing the original separation of people from their means of production and the prevention of communities from controlling their own affairs.

Perhaps most significant is Bookchin's claim that the worker is not inclined to utopianism, to thinking in terms of a new and better society. As he also points out, to Marx the industrial worker's revolutionary role is to revolt against one set of authoritarian rulers, and then submit to the next lot. He also notes that Marx didn't think this problem of world view or "personality" was important; it could be attended to long after the revolution as the vanguard gradually developed communist consciousness in the masses. However from The Simpler Way perspective the revolution cannot take place unless the required post-revolutionary consciousness has first been developed. The alternative way requires the existence of

determination to cooperate in the running of local communities for the collective good. For decades before their revolution the anarchists in Spain had worked hard on this task of developing what they called the "integral personality" and their success in the 1930s was largely due to the pre-existence of the necessary grass roots level initiative, vision, responsibility and autonomy.

This revolution is not just or primarily about liberating the worker from capitalist conditions, it is about liberating all people from consumer society, and all people not just the working class must be the drivers through their participation in the development of the emerging new local systems. We are confronting the old left with the ultimate heresy here, the possible irrelevance of class in this revolution. It will not be a working class movement. There is of course a mortal conflict of class interests at stake in this revolution -- after all it is about whether or not capitalism and the capitalist class survive. But the revolutionary process will not be primarily about conflict in which classes confront each other, let alone a conflict in which the working class leads. (These points will be discussed further below.)

A cherished assumption largely unquestioned by the Left is that after rule by the capitalist class ceases workers will run things. But what about retired people, artists, children and disabled people -- why can't they do some ruling too? If they are not all equally involved could the new town government function satisfactorily? In the new self-governing local communities dependent on the involvement of all to get the technically and socially right decisions for the town and to maintain cohesion and enthusiasm, the basic political forms and processes must be intensely inclusive and participatory, involving all people in town self-government, formal and informal committees, referenda and public discussions. Otherwise the town will not work satisfactorily. It will therefore make no sense to exclude any group from full participation or to privilege any one group. Marxists and the history of revolutions have not reinforced the desirability of rule by citizens, and it is not so surprising that Marxism has come to be so strongly identified with rule by authoritarian elites.

Of course in the long run Marx envisaged no need for top down power. Bookchin despairs at the contradiction here. Why should we expect a long period of "dictatorship by the proletariat" in which the vanguard party continues some of the most detestable core practices of capitalist society to result in a society in which these elements have completely disappeared? Again surely there's a problem if means are not consistent with ends.

This does not mean there can be no role for a "vanguard". Leadership is urgently needed, but in the arena of ideas and education, not force and power.

Socialise the means of production?

Marxists insist that the means of production must be transferred to public control. This might be a good idea in some circumstances, such as those that prevailed in Spain in the 1930s where collective control seems to have greatly improved the performance of factories and farms, the conditions of those who worked in them, and the living standards of people in general. But in the coming conditions it is not likely to be necessary or desirable for most productive capacity to be publicly owned. Certainly it will make no sense for enterprises that have to be large, such as steel works, to remain privately owned and controlled. These should be run as they were in Spain, as public services controlled by participatory democratic means. But in an economy that will be made up mostly of small family enterprises, farms, firms and co-operatives run by people who embrace The Simpler Way there will be no need for most of these means of

production to be owned by society. The need is only to make sure they serve society rather than seek to maximise profit in the market for their owners.

It can be very enjoyable to run one's own "enterprise", whether it be a household economy or a farm or small business, or a co-operative. There would obviously be no sense in society telling you how to run your own vegetable garden, and if it did this it would seriously jeopardise your productivity, as well as your gardening enjoyment. The Simpler Way is about releasing and encouraging enthusiasm, energy, good will and contributions, and these goals are significantly served by making sure people are as free as possible to do their own thing. All that matters is that they keep within the (easy-going) guidelines, e.g., gear activity to meeting local needs, and avoid exploiting labour or attempting to dominate the market. (The Spanish Anarchists allowed people to operate private family businesses and farms outside their collectives, and treated them well, at times giving them access to benefits, loans and surpluses on equal terms with members, but they set guidelines.) In a satisfactory society there would be powerful psychological and social forces leading owners of private small firms and farms to behave in socially desirable ways. The main point here is that people would understand that in a zero growth economy there can be no concern with getting rich or taking over other firms, so those running their own businesses would understand that these are only means by which a sufficient steady income is earned, a worthwhile and appreciated contribution is made, and satisfaction is derived from the freedom to do it your own way. All would know that their individual welfare depended heavily on town cohesion and public spirit, and that these require the opposite of selfishness.

Means must be consistent with the ends

To followers of Gandhi and many others it is a matter of principle that means should not involve practices that clash with those that will characterise the society being worked for. Unfortunately there are many situations in which people have no choice but to adopt means which contradict the ends they are intended to achieve. Often in repressive situations there is no alternative to using violence in an attempt to get rid of murderous regimes as the first step towards establishing a non-violent society.

However, in getting to The Simpler Way there is no option but to adopt means which are consistent with ends. Consider centralisation. The Marxist view of the revolutionary process, and of immediately post-revolutionary society, assumes highly centralised systems where top-down control is essential. However The Simpler Way involves mostly small scale decentralised productive and organisational systems, under the control of local people. These can only be established by decentralised practices. It is not that we opt for the decentralised principle when we might not have, or opt for cooperative, non-authoritarian and non-violent means when their opposites could have been employed. There is no choice here. The transition will be a process in which communities learn by practice, e.g., learn how to cooperatively run meetings, look after our old people, eliminate unemployment, make sure enough bread is produced locally. It is impossible to learn via authoritarian means how to do things in non-authoritarian ways. The strategy must involve communities finding and practising the ways that will characterise post-revolutionary society, therefore any notion of behaving in authoritarian, centralised or violent ways as means to the ultimate goal is logically contradictory and empirically nonsensical.

A major tactical principle: do not confront capitalism!

It is understandable that when confronted by a monster out to dominate us the temptation is to turn to face it and fight it strenuously. This describes just about all previous liberatory movements and revolutions, and there are situations in which it is the appropriate response. However we are now seeing the emergence of a uniquely different situation bringing with it the need for a very different approach, a non-confrontational strategy. It involves turning away from the monster and doing our own thing. What we are going to do in effect is to ignore capitalism to death.

Capitalism cannot survive if people do not continue to purchase, consume and throw away at an accelerating rate. Our aim is to gradually build the alternative practices and systems which will enable more and more people to move out of the mainstream, to shun consumer society, and to secure more and more of their material and social needs from the alternative systems and sources emerging within their neighbourhoods and towns. This revolution is without doubt about the death of capitalism yet it could be a peaceful and non-violent revolution, whereby new local, small scale and participatory systems slowly develop within and replace the old systems. (The Spanish anarchists welcomed factory owners who came across to them.)

Note that this is not a crude "voluntarism" whereby it is assumed that the masses will spontaneously become disgusted with consumerism and start to downshift. The main reason why people will come across to The Simpler Way is because of the new and novel situation we are in. It will be because as the ecological and/or financial crises intensify and seriously disrupt supply to their supermarkets they will increasingly come to realise that this is their only option. (Nor is it assumed that opting out and downshifting is enough; a great deal of "educational" work has to be done to help downshifters see that we must go on to scrap growth, the market, capitalism, etc.; see below.)

At first sight this orientation strikes most people on the radical left as comically implausible. "The rich and powerful never willingly give up their privileges and when threatened fight ruthlessly. Capitalism cannot be got rid of without extreme conflict." But consider the following.

Appfel-Marglin describes the large scale Andean peasant movement as a grass roots non-confrontational phenomenon of direct alternative (re)building. There is a "... withdrawing from and creating alternatives to the dominant system, rather than challenging it directly." (1998, p. 39.) These groups do not seek recognition of their territory by the state; that would be to acknowledge that the state had authority. He notes that they regard themselves not as anticitizens, but as non-citizens. The Relocalise site (2009) says, "As the industrial system spins towards exhaustion ... people at the base are not revolting in order to take the power that the elite have but are revolting to take power over their own lives." The Zapatistas in Mexico seem to provide a paradigm example. They are not out to defeat the Mexican state, take power from it and then build a new society. They are simply building their own society here and now, although from time to time they have to fight to defend what they are building.

Years ago Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies pointed to possibly thousands of villages in Asia and Latin America taking much the same approach. (Shiva and Mies, 1993.) Korten holds open the hope that we can "starve capitalism to death" (1999, p. 262.) Rude says, "The goal is no longer to overthrow world capitalism in an anti-capitalist revolution as in the traditional Marxist model, as much as it is to leave capitalism behind by slowly creating a new post-capitalist culture and economy in capitalism's place..." (1998, p. 53.) Quinn says, "To overthrow hierarchy is pointless; we just want to leave it behind." (1999, p. 95.) Buckminister Fuller put it

this way, "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." (Quoted by Quinn, 1999, p. 137.)

The standard Marxist retort here is of course that you must fight the monster because if you begin to become a significant threat it will crush you. But in the coming and unprecedented era of intense scarcity, will it be able to? We have now entered an era in which forces undermining the legitimacy of consumer capitalist society are gaining strength. Legitimacy is fed by comfort and complacency. Consumer capitalist society is safe as long as it keeps the supermarket shelves stocked, keeps up the distracting trivial entertainment, and holds the lack of cohesion, the unemployment, injustice, poverty and suffering to ignorable levels. But scarcity is going to shatter all that. There have already been increased rumblings in the most comfortable countries about the failure of the system to deliver quality of life cohesion and about the obscene inequality and "exclusion". The 2008 financial crisis was a blow to the taken for granted infallible correctness of free markets. But these effects will be nothing compared with what's coming. Just wait until we slam into the "2030 Spike", the coincidence of huge and insoluble shortages of oil, water, food, land, phosphorous and basic minerals...accompanied by rising population, greenhouse and other environmental effects and accelerating social breakdown. We are likely to see collapses in the supply systems stocking the supermarket shelves within the next 20 years.

This multifaceted global catastrophe will impact heavily on the power of the super-rich to run things at all, let alone run them in their own interests. The system will have little capacity to deal with these events. It will therefore be in no position to stop people voting with their feet. It cannot run big governments, secret police forces or armies without lots of oil. It cannot surveil and intervene in every town and neighbourhood to stop us planting carrots and oganising our co-ops. Never before will revolutionaries have had such an opportunity, such a vacuum to walk into.

Throughout the previous two hundred years revolutionaries have been up against increasingly powerful industrial, bureaucratic and military systems, capable of turning guns against dissenters. But our enemy will have great difficulty finding the resources to organise anything at all and will confront a foe that is everywhere, with enormous capacity to do its own local thing and ignore bamboozled authorities and elites. Time is therefore on our side. Before long circumstances will jolt people into the realisation that consumer-capitalist society will not provide for them. Our present task is to get the alternative ways up and running well enough in the time that's available so that people will be able to see that there are attractive alternatives, and come across to join us. The worry is that the coming crises for consumer-capitalist society will develop too quickly and be too severe for a more or less orderly transition. If the breakdowns are too disruptive our brief window of opportunity could close.

This is not to say that the coming crises will inevitably see us prevail. The most likely outcome will be acceptance by the middle classes as well as the rich of vicious state repression in an effort to secure their property and domination. That can only be headed off if we can build sufficient countervailing awareness and systems in the short time available.

From a more philosophical and historical perspective it can be seen that sometimes profoundly radical change occurs without overt conflict. Sometimes it is more like the fading out of a once-dominant paradigm, to be replaced by a newly popular one. This is in fact the norm at the level of big paradigm change in science (on Kuhn see Barker, 2006), and in many cultural realms such as art, pop music, style, manners and fashion. A particular view or theory or form is dominant for a time, but then people more or less lose interest in it and move to another one. In science a

dominant paradigm is rarely if ever dropped because it has been shown to be wrong. It will not be that the Psychoanalytic approach to psychology will some day disprove or defeat the Behaviourist one, or the other way around. What will happen, if anything, is that over time most psychologists will come to prefer one or the other, or a third position. If one "wins out in the long run" it will not be as the result of a process well described as overt struggle whereby one vanquishes the other. It will be a matter of the waxing and waning of support.

Some of the biggest revolutionary changes of the twentieth century seem to have occurred in this way, most notably the collapses of the Soviet Union, the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. These seem to have been characterised not by set-piece, head to head, violent confrontations in which one side was driven from the field, but mostly by people "voting with their feet" and ceasing to support, after a long period of growing disenchantment and increasing awareness of the desirability of other ways. These revolutionary changes seem to be much better described as collapses due to increasing internal failure to perform or to sheer disenchantment, rather than as defeats in mortal combat with superior opposing powers. In the end the vast military, bureaucratic and economic power of the ruling establishments counted for nothing in the face of a withdrawal of support, a loss of legitimacy.

This is not to say that it is never appropriate to engage in resistance and direct confrontation. Often it is necessary to defend vigorously, and to use force. The argument is that when the nature of our new and unique situation is understood we can see that our main strategy must be indirect.

On transition, the anarchists show the way

The argument has in effect been for a basically anarchist approach to transition. The coming of the era of scarcity has invalidated most of the conventional and radical ideas and campaigns to do with social change that have been on the agenda for centuries. Given the situation we are entering a sustainable and just society can only be built by ordinary people as they learn their way to the local systems which suit them and which they can run to provide well for all. Power, force and the state are not very relevant in this context, especially in the present early stages of the revolution. The key to this revolution is the development of the necessary ideas, values, visions and commitments that will lead "ordinary" people to build the new society. The immediate question is therefore how might we best endeavour to contribute to the development of those understandings and dispositions.

Build now

Marxists generally see the building of the good society as something that can't be commenced for a long time, because first we have to get rid of the old one, then deal with the wreckage, and then survive a lengthy (and dangerous) period of rule by the vanguard party. They assume that somewhere in the long term future mass consciousness will reach the level at which the state can fade away. The anarchists however argue that we can and must begin the building now, before the old system has gone. They say we must "prefigure" the new, build those aspects of it that we can now, within the old society, with a view to attracting others and elaborating our construction until it fully replaces the old. Bakunin said the revolutionary must "...try to build the structures of the future society within the present society". (Rai, 1995, p. 99.) Pepper says, "...the way to create a desired society is to start living it out -- thinking it and doing it --here and

now in the society you want to replace." (Pepper,1996, pp. 36, 305.) Bookchin advocates building instances of the new society now. (1980, p. 263.) It should be apparent from the above discussion that believers in The Simpler Way are enthusiastic advocates of prefiguring. They do not think it is necessary to get rid of the old before it will be possible to start building the new.

From the perspective of The Simpler Way the point of prefiguring can easily be misunderstood. It is not primarily to increase the number of post-revolutionary ways that we have in place, and the assumption is not that just adding post-revolutionary arrangements one by one will end up with these having replaced consumer-capitalist ways. The point of prefiguring is educational/ideological. The building here and now is the best way for us to develop the awareness of the new vision and values. It is important for us to engage in the building in order to be in the best position to spread the new ideas. It puts us side by side with fellow compost makers, it gives us the opportunity at group meetings to explain why radical system change is needed and how the things being done at the community garden can lead on to this, if we gear them to increasing local control of local affairs. Thus the building here and now is the supremely important revolutionary strategy. The following sections elaborate on this point.

The significance of the Permaculture, "down-shifting", Voluntary Simplicity, Eco-village and Transition Towns movements?

All these overlapping movements involve important aspects of The Simpler Way vision, yet most if not all fall far short of what is required and will probably make no significant difference if they remain on their present paths. This is because they do not challenge consumer-capitalist society. They are for various practices and values that are alternative to those of the mainstream, but these are easily accommodated and constitute no threat. People on the left tend to see this, but then mistakenly dismiss this whole "alternative lifestyle" arena as having no revolutionary significance.

What these movements are not for at this point in time is the elimination of growth, or the market system, or affluence...or capitalism. Nor do they show concern for local communities taking the control of their own economies out of the hands of the state, the corporations and banks, and the market. (They often <u>say</u> they are for a new society, but their literature, websites and actions contain no radical sub-goals, strategies or projects, or even discussion of the issue.) Unless they eventually go on to embrace these "level two" goals, that is radical, system-changing goals, they will remain as largely irrelevant "counter-cultural" minorities within capitalist society. At best we will end up with a capitalist society containing lots of community gardens.

Nevertheless the main purpose of this discussion is to argue that this domain offers the most promising revolutionary territory, and to persuade people on the left that joining these movements is what we should do. We should do it in order to attempt over time to increase the understanding of their participants that these initiatives need to move up to the "level two" goals if we are going to solve the big global problems. This does not mean getting them to abandon their original goals, it means continuing to work for those but now as elements within a "rainbow coalition" contributing to the over-arching goal of radical system change. (This case is detailed in Chapters 12 and 13 of Trainer, 2010a.)

What then is to be done?

To paraphrase Latouche (2012, p. 75), the limits to growth are giving the left its last chance. Yet that opportunity is not well recognised. Bookchin saw this some time ago. "The New Left, like the old left, has never grasped the revolutionary potential of the ecological issues, nor has it used ecology as a basis for understanding the problems of communist reconstruction and utopia." (1973, p. 242.) In my view the neo-liberal triumph has routed the left, driving its remnants mostly into incomprehensible, pretentious babbling to itself which cannot possibly make any significant difference to the world. (For paradigms see for example Hardt and Negri, 2000, and Bischler and Nitzan, 2009. It also produces large volumes of, in my view correct, analyses of the appalling ruling class domination...but which also seem to be read only by a very few people within the left.) By far the most promising frontier now for anyone who wishes to replace consumer-capitalist society is the challenge to it being set by resource and ecological limits. Large and increasing numbers of ordinary people are seriously concerned about these issues and significant numbers of them are actively heading more or less in the general direction of the required alternative ways. The most effective strategy for people on the radical left is to join these movements, with a view to helping their participants to see that they must eventually come to focus on the huge and radical system-changing goals. But they must do it from a perspective centred on scarcity, limits, localism and simplicity.

Unfortunately the left is not well disposed towards taking on this work. It is more at home producing academically respectable analyses (and less respectable, but nevertheless important diatribes), and fighting capitalism head on, when what we most need are the skills and the dispositions that enable a) practical contributions at the level of community gardens, workshops and co-ops etc., and b) clear and simple persuasive arguments to be put in informal, one-to one and group discussions. "Praxis" needs to be redefined as being less to do with workers, unions, protests and industrial action and more about green, participatory localism and community. This revolution cannot proceed unless and until large numbers of ordinary people see the need to replace affluence and capitalist control with frugality, localism and participatory control, and the best way we can facilitate that is by joining Transition Towns and related movements. In other words we need to take on an <u>outreach function</u>, looking for ways of connecting with and communicating to those who have begun to go down the right path but are far from thinking in sufficiently radical system change terms. This will at best be slow and unspectacular work with little indication of effectiveness for a long time. (Possible strategies are summarised in Trainer, 2012d.)

Unfortunately at present the left is a long way from the theoretical perspective argued above, and therefore from the implications for transition strategy and activism derived from it. It urgently needs to come to terms with the centrality of scarcity and the consequent need for transition to some kind of Simpler Way.

The spirit of this case has not been to condemn the radical left but to harness its indispensable revolutionary insights, values and energies to a redefined quest. Unlike just about all other global ecological, justice, peace and emancipatory movements the radical left understands that progress is not possible unless and until capitalism has been transcended. It therefore has an indispensable role to play in the building of the many movements of discontent into a coalition that might achieve that end, but it cannot play that role unless it takes on board scarcity and simplicity.

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